Meet a CPA VIPP… Very Important

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Although Jim is not a payroll professional, he is our featured VIPP this month because of the insightful keynote presentation he recently gave at our Annual Conference in Ottawa this June. This article is based on parts of his presentation on change, including ideas on how to embrace it. Jim welcomes your comments at jcarroll@jimcarroll.com. His Web site can be found at www.jimcarroll.com

The ongoing forces of globalization, corporate restructuring, outsourcing and off-shoring are such that it is quite likely that the payroll profession and payroll industry won't look the same ten years out. Many of you have come to recognize that organizations are continuing to refocus their workforce structure for an economy which demands ever increasing productivity, flexibility and innovation—and as this happens, we are seeing many routine, day-to-day, transaction-oriented functions moving offshore. Expect that trend to continue, and perhaps even pick up steam. And that is why, as a payroll professional, you should adjust your career strategy so that you are playing a role that is less likely to be buffeted by the significant structural change now underway in the world economy. How do you do this?

1. Accept the inevitability of change. The only person who really likes change is a wet baby. Yet the fact remains—we live in a period of time that is witnessing the most rapid rate of change to have ever occurred, and the first step in coping with change is to accept its reality. Here's that reality, the Chicago Tribune recently noted that we are now witnessing the emergence of "…. a global market in which an ever increasing portion of the developing world acquires the education and opportunity to provide skilled-labor, including professional services of almost every kind at a world class level." Put it another way—it is likely that a lot of basic payroll jobs will move offshore through the next decade, and many payroll professionals will find themselves in a good degree of career turmoil. That's a fact.

2. Step up to a strategic role. So what do you do about this? Make a transition that takes you from a tactical role to one that is more strategic. Ensure you fulfill a role that provides a great degree of value to the organization as it pursues objectives related to cost savings, efficiencies, work redesign, or other activities. Do that and you'll find that your job and career is less likely to be one subjected to global workforce change. Making a tactical to strategic transition means that you are stepping up to the plate to provide more bang for your buck. It involves moving from a role that involves clerical activities, information processing and reconciliation, to one in which you provide professional level services that involve such matters as payroll policy and strategic direction, payroll vendor relationship management, training and system implementation, as well as horizon spotting for issues that will affect payroll planning and standards.

3. Take the time to understand organizational strategy. To do this, you need to ensure that you understand the overall corporate strategy; otherwise, you might miss many of the emerging opportunities by which you might be able to step into a strategic role.

4. Change your approach. So things need to change, and maybe one of the first things that needs to change is attitude! When it comes to changing what you do and the approach you take in your profession, it is easy to put in place the NOTMY barriers. That's when you react with an attitude that "it's not my department / responsibility / job / area of expertise /

problem." Yet it was Albert Einstein who said, "the definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over and over again, but expecting a different result." The jobs and careers that are moving offshore are those that involve repetitive, transactional oriented work, and it is resulting because senior management in every organization is waking up to the opportunity that can come from "operational innovation." Today, everything is under a microscope—from business processes to customer and staff service, to partnerships and external relationships—all with a view as to how things could be done better. And when it comes to HR and payroll, there is no shortage of new software tools and HR initiatives that can help. Find out what is going on out there, and do it fast.

5. Foster and maintain an insatiable curiosity. To understand the types of opportunities that can come from a strategic role, and in order to get involved, you should engender a curiosity as to the world around you. For example, you need to open up your mind to what IT companies are talking about when it comes to new employee self-service modules built into many HR software applications, or insight into the unique new employee benefit concepts and methodologies that are being introduced to the corporate world on a regular basis.

6. Get involved. Decide to get involved—and you'll find that everything else will come easier. I often tell the story during one of my keynotes about my son Thomas and the "hockey blocker." At the age of 3, he decided that he needed a hockey blocker to be a better goalie. We patiently explained to him that he might be a little too young for such an expense; that his hand would grow, and that he would quickly outgrow the blocker. That's when he took matters into his own hands, so to speak. At his sitter's the next day, he asked for a cereal box. He painted it all so that it was just one colour, and had her cut out a little handle for the inside—and that became his hockey blocker. I looked at him when he came home with it and I thought: that's it! He is taking the initiative! He looked at his situation and said: I am going to figure out what I can do to deal with this. Isn't it that what we should be doing? One area that you should definitely be taking the initiative is with professional certification because obtaining proper education and training is an important part of being recognized as a professional.

7. Be your own PR agent. Whether you are just starting a transition from a tactical or strategic role, or whether you are already there, it might not hurt to spend a little bit of time to clearly put into perspective the value that you bring to the organization. Take the time to establish proof that you've succeeded, and educate management that you've helped to achieve corporate strategy, without going overboard.

8. Battle the perceptions. Interestingly enough, it seems that management might not appreciate the full range of skills that you bring to the table. Make sure that the folks upstairs fully understand what you can accomplish—and battle the perceptions that all you do is "process paycheques."

> **"Yes, there's lots of change coming at us, but if we position ourselves right and do the right things, we can turn it from a period of threat and challenge into one of opportunity and benefit."**

9. Don't self-limit. As you make the transition from a tactical to strategic role, don't limit yourself in terms of your understanding of what you can do. It's the easiest thing in the world for anyone to question whether they have what it takes to cope with change, and a good part of this comes from the fact that all of us have a built-in inferiority complex.

10. Don't obsess over things. The change that we will witness in the coming decade will be significant, and yet, it is the natural order of things in an economy of rapid change. That's why it's best to gain insight from Charles Schulz, who observed that we "shouldn't worry about the world coming to an end today. It's already tomorrow in Australia." ■